

REMARKS

I. Status of the Claims

Claims 1-36 are currently pending in this application.

By this Amendment, the title of the invention and the specification have been amended. Claims 1-36 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. Claims 37-56 have been newly added. No new matter has been introduced by this Amendment. Entry and consideration of this Amendment are respectfully requested. Upon entry of this Amendment, claims 37-56 would be pending.

II. Information Disclosure Statement

The Examiner indicated that those references listed in the Specification have not been considered. However, an Information Disclosure Statement, PTO-1449 Form and references listed in the Specification was filed on July 10, 2002. Thus, consideration of IDS with the references listed in the Specification is respectfully requested.

III. The Examiner's Request For A Substitute Specification

At the request of the Examiner, Applicant has amended the title of the invention and the specification to address alleged informalities and respectfully requests approval and entry of such amendments. Please substitute the enclosed, substitute specification for the originally filed specification. A clean and marked-up substitute specification are also enclosed. The marked-up substitute specification is provided to show the changes made to the specification by bracketing the text that has been deleted and underlining the text that has been added.



The substitute specification is believed to comply with 37 C.F.R. §1.52(a) and (b), and does not include any new matter.

IV. Objection to Claims 1-36

The Examiner has objected to claims 1-36 as containing informalities. Applicant has canceled claims 1-36. Thus, withdrawal of the objection of these claims is respectfully requested.

V. Rejections under 35 U.S.C. §§102 and 103

Claims 1-34 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Griesmer et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,379,335). Claims 35 and 36 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Greismer. Applicant respectfully traverses the rejection of these claims, for the reasons set forth below.

As to claims 1-36, these claims have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer.

As to the newly added claims, claim 37 is directed to an imaging apparatus in which a controller generates a signal so as to overlap a first period and a second period. The first period is an interval between a timing when a first signal, which permits the irradiating unit to irradiate the electromagnetic wave, is outputted from the controller and a timing when the electromagnetic wave is outputted from the irradiating unit. The second period is an interval between a timing when a second signal, which initializes the image sensing unit, is outputted from the controller and a timing when an initialization of the image sensing unit has been completed.



Griesmer does not disclose or suggest the above feature of the present invention. For example, in Griesmer, an acceleration of a grid starts after the time period t_1 is elapsed. See Griesmer, Figs. 2 and 3, column 7, page 5-22 (indicating that “[t]he value of t_1 is selected to provide sufficient time to prepare the X-ray source for radiation production”).

Accordingly, claim 37 and its dependent claims are patentably distinguishable over the cited reference. For similar reasons as discussed above for claims 46, 47 and 56 and their dependent claims are also patentably distinguishable over the cited reference.



CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the rejection of claims and consideration of newly added claims 37-56 and allowance of this application.

AUTHORIZATION

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required for consideration of this Amendment to Deposit Account No. 13-4503, Order No. 1232-4697. A DUPLICATE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS ATTACHED.

In the event that an extension of time is required, or which may be required in addition to that requested in a petition for an extension of time, the Commissioner is requested to grant a petition for that extension of time which is required to make this response timely and is hereby authorized to charge any fee for such an extension of time or credit any overpayment for an extension of time to Deposit Account No. 13-4503, Order No. 1232-4697. A DUPLICATE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS ATTACHED.

Respectfully submitted,
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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

IMAGING APPARATUS, IMAGING SYSTEM, IMAGING CONTROL METHOD, AND
STORAGE MEDIUM WITH TIMING CONTROL FUNCTIONALITY

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an imaging apparatus, imaging system, imaging control
10 method, and computer-readable storage medium which stores processing steps in executing the
method, which are used for, e.g., an apparatus or system for performing radiation imaging of an
object using a grid.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Conventionally, a radiation method [of] may involve irradiating an object with radiation
15 such as X-rays and detecting the intensity distribution of the radiation transmitted through the
object to acquire the radiation image of the object. This method is widely used in the field of
industrial non-destructive inspection or medical diagnosis.

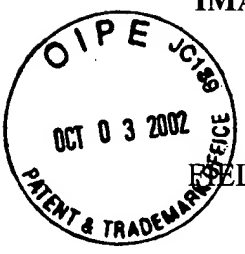
In the most popular radiation imaging method, a combination of a so-called “phosphor
plate” (or “sensitized paper”) which emits fluorescent light by radiation and a silver halide film
20 is used.

In the above radiation imaging method, first, an object is irradiated with radiation. The
radiation transmitted through the object is converted into visible light by the phosphor plate to
form a latent image on the silver halide film. After that, the silver halide film is chemically
processed to acquire a visible image.

25 A thus obtained film image (radiation image) is a so-called analog picture and is used for
medical diagnosis or inspection.

A computed radiography apparatus ([to be] referred to as a “CR apparatus” hereinafter)
which acquires a radiation image using an imaging plate ([to be] referred to as an “IP”
hereinafter) coated with a stimuable phosphor as a phosphor is also being put into practice.

30 When an IP primarily excited by radiation irradiation is secondarily excited by visible
light such as a red laser beam, light called stimuable fluorescent light is emitted. The CR
apparatus detects this light emission using a photosensor such as a photomultiplier to acquire a

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5 radiation image and outputs a visible image to a photosensitive material or CRT on the basis of the radiation image data.

Although the CR apparatus is a digital imaging apparatus, it is regarded as an indirect digital imaging apparatus because the image formation process, reading by secondary excitation, is necessary. The reason for "indirect" is that the apparatus cannot instantaneously display the radiation image, like the above-described apparatus ([to be] referred to as an "analog imaging apparatus" hereinafter) which acquires an analog radiation image such as an analog picture.

10 In recent years, a technique has been developed, which acquires a digital radiation image using a photoelectric conversion device in which pixels formed from small photoelectric conversion elements or switching elements are arrayed in a matrix as an image detection means for acquiring a radiation image from radiation through an object.

Examples of a radiation imaging apparatus employing the above technique, i.e., having phosphors stacked on a sensor such as a CCD or amorphous silicon two-dimensional image sensing element are disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,418,377, 5,396,072, 5,381,014, 5,132,539, and 4,810,881.

20 Such a radiation imaging apparatus can instantaneously display acquired radiation image data and is therefore regarded as a direct digital imaging apparatus.

As advantages of the indirect or direct digital imaging apparatus over the analog imaging apparatus, **it becomes possible to provide** a filmless system, an increase in acquired information by image processing, and database construction **[become possible]**.

25 An advantage of the direct digital imaging apparatus over the indirect digital imaging apparatus is instantaneity. The direct digital imaging apparatus can be effectively used on, e.g., a medical scene with urgent need because a radiation image obtained by imaging can be immediately displayed at that place.

30 When the radiation imaging apparatus described above is used as a medical apparatus to detect the radiation transmission density of a patient as an object to be examined, a scattering ray removing member called a "grid" is normally inserted between the patient and a radiation transmission density detector ([to be] also simply referred to as a "detector" hereinafter) to reduce the influence of scattering rays generated when radiation is transmitted through the person to be examined.

5 A grid is formed by alternately arranging a thin foil of a material such as lead which hardly passes radiation and that of a material such as aluminum which readily passes radiation perpendicularly to the irradiation direction of radiation.

With this structure, radiation components such as scattering rays in the patient, which are generated when the patient is irradiated with radiation and have angles with respect to the axis of
10 irradiation, are absorbed by the lead foil in the grid before they reach the detector. For this reason, a high-contrast image can be obtained.

If the grid stands still during imaging, the radiation reaching the lead in the grid is wholly absorbed including both the scattering rays and the primary rays of radiation. Since a density difference distribution corresponding to the array in the grid is formed at the detection section, a
15 striped radiation image is detected, resulting in inconvenience in reading at the time of image diagnosis or the like.

A radiation imaging apparatus having a mechanism for moving the grid during imaging has already been placed on the market.

However, since the above-described conventional digital radiation imaging apparatus is
20 designed to execute discrete sampling, interference called “moiré” may take place for a periodical image such as stripes of the grid (this phenomenon will be referred to as “grid stripe image formation on the object” hereinafter).

Especially when a reduced radiation image is displayed, the period of moiré changes in various ways depending on the reduction magnification and adversely affects reading at the time
25 of image diagnosis or the like.

To avoid the problem of grid stripe image formation on the object as described above, the grid stripe image formation on the object must be sufficiently reduced by more strictly managing grid movement than in the analog imaging apparatus.

More specifically, a radiation generator generally has a delay time of several ten to
30 several hundred ms from a radiation irradiation instruction (instruction by pressing the imaging button[; to also be] and also referred to as an “imaging request” hereinafter) from the user to actual radiation irradiation ([to also be] also referred to as “actual irradiation” hereinafter). This delay time changes between radiation tubes and between devices (radiation generators) for generating radiation by the radiation tubes.

5 Hence, to avoid the problem of grid stripe image formation on the object, the position and speed of the grid must be controlled in consideration of the delay time corresponding to the radiation tube and radiation generator used for radiation imaging. Neither an apparatus nor system that **[implement]** implements such control are conventionally available.

10 Additionally, in radiation imaging aiming at, e.g., image diagnosis, since the positional relationship between internal organs represented by lungs and diaphragm largely contributes to the image diagnostic performance, the imaging timing is very important.

For this reason, the user must issue an imaging request while observing the movement of the object and control the radiation imaging apparatus as soon as possible for the imaging request. However, after the imaging request, the sensor such as a two-dimensional solid-state
15 image sensing element and the grid must be initialized. Each initialization takes several ten to several hundred ms.

Although the time delay from the imaging request to actual irradiation is preferably shortened by parallelly performing control of the radiation imaging apparatus and initialization of the sensor and grid[.], **[Neither]** neither an apparatus nor system that **[implement]**
20 implements such control are conventionally available.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention has been made to solve the above problems, and has as its object to provide an imaging apparatus, imaging system, imaging control method, and computer-readable storage medium which stores processing steps of executing the method, which can provide a
25 satisfactory image at a desired imaging timing by implementing grid movement control according to the time response characteristics of the radiation generation function and a decrease in time delay from an imaging request to actual irradiation.

In order to achieve the above object, an imaging apparatus according to the first aspect of the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement.

30 That is, there is provided an imaging apparatus having a function of irradiating an object with irradiation means and sensing light transmitted through the object with image sensing means, comprising control means for controlling an actual irradiation instruction timing for the irradiation means on the basis of a pre-irradiation delay time as a time between an instruction and irradiation of actual irradiation of the irradiation means.

5 An imaging system according to the first aspect of the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement.

That is, there is provided an imaging system in which a plurality of devices are communicably connected, wherein at least one of the plurality of devices has the function of the imaging apparatus [of claim 1] which controls an actual irradiation instruction timing for
10 irradiation means on the basis of a pre-irradiation delay time as a time between an instruction and irradiation of actual irradiation of the irradiation means.

An imaging apparatus according to the second aspect of the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement.

That is, there is provided an imaging apparatus having a function of irradiating an object
15 with irradiation means and sensing light transmitted through the object with image sensing means through a movable grid, comprising control means for controlling an actual irradiation instruction timing for the irradiation means on the basis of an initialization time of grid movement.

An imaging system according to the second aspect of the present invention is
20 characterized by the following arrangement.

That is, there is provided an imaging system in which a plurality of devices are communicably connected, wherein at least one of the plurality of devices has the function of the imaging apparatus [of claim 10] which controls an actual irradiation instruction timing for
irradiation means on the basis of an initialization time of grid movement.

25 An imaging control method according to the first aspect of the present invention is characterized by the following step.

That is, there is provided an imaging control method of irradiating an object with irradiation means and sensing light transmitted through the object with image sensing means, comprising the step of controlling an actual irradiation instruction timing for the irradiation
30 means on the basis of a pre-irradiation delay time as a time between an instruction and irradiation of actual irradiation of the irradiation means.

An imaging control method according to the second aspect of the present invention is characterized by the following step.

5 That is, there is provided an imaging control method of irradiating an object with irradiation means and sensing light transmitted through the object with image sensing means through a movable grid, comprising the step of controlling an actual irradiation instruction timing for the irradiation means on the basis of an initialization time of grid movement.

A storage medium of the present invention is a computer-readable storage medium
10 characterized in that the storage medium stores a processing program for executing the imaging control method.

Other objects and advantages besides those discussed above shall be apparent to those skilled in the art for the description of a preferred embodiment of the invention which follows. In the description, reference is made to accompanying drawings, which form a part hereof, and
15 which illustrate an example of the invention. Such example, however, is not exhaustive of the various embodiments of the invention, and therefore reference is made to the claims which follow the description for determining the scope of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing the arrangement of a radiation imaging system
20 according to the first embodiment, to which the present invention is applied;

Fig. 2 is a flow chart for explaining operation of the radiation imaging system;

Figs. 3A to 3F are timing charts for explaining the operation control timing of the radiation imaging system;

Fig. 4 is a block diagram showing the arrangement of a radiation imaging system
25 according to the second embodiment, to which the present invention is applied;

Fig. 5 is a flow chart for explaining operation of the radiation imaging system; and

Figs. 6A to 6H are timing charts for explaining the operation control timing of the radiation imaging system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

30 The embodiments of the present invention will be described below with reference to the accompanying drawings.

(First Embodiment)

5 The present invention is applied to, e.g., a radiation imaging system 100 as shown in Fig. 1.

<Arrangement of Radiation Imaging System 100>

As shown in Fig. 1, the radiation imaging system 100 has an arrangement [in which] including an imaging device 110 for acquiring an image signal of an object (patient) 102 to be
10 examined, a control device 111 for controlling the entire system 100, a storage device 112 for storing various data such as a control program for control processing by the control device 111 and the image, a display device 113 for displaying the image or the like, an image processing device 114 for executing arbitrary image processing for the image signal of the patient 102, which is obtained by the imaging device 110, an imaging condition instruction device 115 for
15 instructing various imaging conditions in the imaging device 110, an imaging button 116 for instructing the system 100 to start imaging operation, and a radiation generator 117 for generating a radiation (e.g., X-rays) from a radiation tube 101 to the patient 102. The devices or components are connected to each other through a system bus 120 to exchange data.

The imaging device 110 is located at a position where the radiation generated from the
20 radiation tube 101 of the radiation generator 117 can be received through the patient 102[, and]. The imaging device 110 comprises a chest stand 103, grid 104, phosphor 105, sensor (two-dimensional solid-state image sensing element) 106, signal reading section 107, and grid moving section 108.

The chest stand 103, grid 104, phosphor 105, and sensor 106 are arranged in this order
25 from the side of the radiation tube 101 of the radiation generator 117.

<Series of Operations of Radiation Imaging System 100>

Outlines of the imaging procedure and radiation image generation process in the radiation imaging system 100 will be described here.

The user (e.g., radiation technician) positions the patient 102 to the chest stand 103 and
30 selectively inputs appropriate imaging conditions (e.g., tube voltage, tube current, irradiation time, type of sensor 106, and type of radiation tube 101) using the imaging condition instruction device 115.

In this embodiment, the imaging conditions are manually [input] inputted by the user through the imaging condition instruction device 115. However, the present invention is not

5 limited to this. For example, the imaging conditions may be [input] inputted through a network (not shown) connected to the imaging device 110.

Next, the user presses the imaging button 116 to request the control device 111 to start imaging operation.

After receiving the imaging operation start request from the user, the control device 111
10 performs initialization necessary in the system 100 and prompts the radiation generator 117 to irradiate the person with radiation.

In accordance with the irradiation instruction from the control device 111, the radiation generator 117 generates radiation from the radiation tube 101.

The radiation generated from the radiation tube 101 passes through the patient 102 and
15 reaches chest stand 103.

The chest stand 103 is exposed by the radiation transmitted through the patient 102 with a transmitted radiation distribution in accordance with the structure in the patient 102.

Since the chest stand 103 is sufficiently transparent to the radiation, the radiation transmitted through the chest stand 103 reaches the grid 104.

20 The grid 104 removes scattering ray components in the radiation transmitted through the chest stand 103 and sends only effective radiation components to the phosphor 105.

The phosphor 105 converts the radiation (effective radiation) from the grid 104 into visible light in accordance with the spectral sensitivity of the sensor 106.

The sensor 106 receives the radiation from the phosphor 105, converts the radiation light
25 into an electrical signal (image signal) by two-dimensional photoelectric conversion, and accumulates it.

The signal reading section 107 reads out the image signal accumulated in the sensor 106 and stores the signal in the storage device 112 as a radiation image signal.

The image processing device 114 performs appropriate image processing for the radiation
30 image signal stored in the storage device 112.

The display device 113 displays the radiation image signal after processing by the image processing device 114.

<Most Characteristic Operation and Arrangement of Radiation Imaging System 100>

5 Fig. 2 is a flow chart showing operation control processing executed by the control device 111 for the system 100. Figs. 3A to 3F are timing charts showing the operation control timing.

The processing shown in Fig. 2 corresponds to processing from the above-described imaging condition input by the user to image signal read from the sensor 106.

10 Step S201:

The control device 111 recognizes an irradiation time T_{exp} , the type of sensor 106 used for imaging, and the type of radiation tube 101 on the basis of imaging conditions selectively input by the user through the imaging condition instruction device 115.

In accordance with the recognized information, the control device 111 determines control
15 until radiation irradiation and control after radiation irradiation by processing from step S202.

Step S202:

The control device 111 determines a sensor initialization time T_{ss} in accordance with the type of sensor 106.

The sensor initialization time T_{ss} changes depending on the type of sensor 106. For
20 example, when the sensor 106 requires predischARGE of a dark current, the pre-read time is the sensor initialization time T_{ss} . From this time, signal accumulation in the sensor 106 starts.

Step S203:

The control device 111 determines a grid initialization time T_{gs} and grid oscillation convergence time T_{ge} from the irradiation time T_{exp} .

25 More specifically, to reduce stripe image formation on the object by the grid 104, for example, radiation must be transmitted through stripes of 10 or more cycles. However, the moving distance of the grid 104 is limited. Hence, the moving speed of the grid 104 must be optimized in accordance with the irradiation time T_{exp} . In addition, since the grid 104 generally has a focal point, the irradiation central position of radiation and the central position of the grid
30 104 must be aligned to obtain an image with a satisfactory quality.

Hence, a time required until the optimum moving speed (target moving speed) of the grid 104 is obtained, and the position of the grid 104 reaches the irradiation central position (target position) of radiation corresponds to the grid initialization time T_{gs} .

5 In this embodiment, the grid initialization times T_{gs} until the target moving speed and position of the grid 104 are obtained and the grid oscillation convergence times T_{ge} required to converge device oscillation caused by movement are obtained as a table by experiments in correspondence with, e.g., various patterns of irradiation time T_{exp} and moving speed of the grid 104 and stored in the storage device 112 in advance. The grid initialization time T_{gs} and grid
10 oscillation convergence time T_{ge} corresponding to the actually obtained irradiation time T_{exp} are determined from the table information in the storage device 112.

Step S204:

The control device 111 determines a pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} and post-irradiation delay time T_{xe} on the basis of the type of radiation tube 101.

15 The pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} is a time after the radiation generator 117 is instructed to permit radiation irradiation until the radiation generator 117 actually starts radiation irradiation, and is determined by the type of radiation generator 117 or radiation tube 101.

In this embodiment, the pre-irradiation delay times T_{xs} corresponding to, e.g., various types of radiation generator 117 or radiation tube 101 are prepared as a table in advance, and a
20 corresponding pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} is determined from the table information.

The post-irradiation delay time T_{xe} is a delay time after the elapse of irradiation time T_{exp} until the radiation generator 117 actually ends the radiation irradiation. The post-irradiation delay time T_{xe} is also determined in accordance with the same procedure as that for the pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} .

25 Step S205:

The control device 111 determines an irradiation delay time T_l .

The irradiation delay time T_l is a delay time after an imaging request is input by the user through the imaging button 116 until the radiation generator 117 actually starts radiation irradiation. Of the sensor initialization time T_{ss} determined in step S202, the grid initialization
30 time T_{gs} determined in step S203, and the pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} determined in step S204, the longest time is determined as the irradiation delay time T_l .

Step S206:

The control device 111 determines a time table before irradiation.

5 This time table is determined from the sensor initialization time T_{ss} determined in step S202, the grid initialization time T_{gs} determined in step S203, and the pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} determined in step S204.

 More specifically, the control sequence and times (timings) of initialization of the sensor 106, start of drive of the grid 104, and radiation irradiation instruction (irradiation permission) to
10 the radiation generator 117 after the imaging request input by the user through the imaging button 116 is recognized are determined by subtracting each delay time from the irradiation delay time T_l determined in step S205.

 The initialization timing of the sensor 106 is determined as " $T_l - T_{ss}$ ". The drive start timing of the grid 104 is determined as " $T_l - T_{gs}$ ". The radiation irradiation instruction
15 (irradiation permission) timing for the radiation generator 117 is determined as " $T_l - T_{xs}$ ".

 Step S207:

 After control before radiation irradiation is determined in the above-described way, the control device 111 determines whether an imaging request is input by the user through the imaging button 116 and stands by until an imaging request is received.

20 Step S208:

 Upon recognizing that an imaging request is input by the user through the imaging button 116, the control device 111 executes operation control according to the time table determined in step S206.

 Initialization of the sensor 106 is started after the elapse of " $T_l - T_{ss}$ ", drive of the grid
25 104 is started after the elapse of " $T_l - T_{gs}$ ", and irradiation permission is executed after the elapse of " $T_l - T_{xs}$ ".

 Step S209:

 The control device 111 stands by until the total time ($T_l + T_{exp} + T_{xe}$) of the irradiation time (actual exposure time) T_{exp} determined in step S201, the post-irradiation delay time T_{xe}
30 determined in step S204, and the irradiation delay time T_l determined in step S205 elapses.

 Step S210:

 When recognizing that the time ($T_l + T_{exp} + T_{xe}$) has elapsed, the control device 111 stops driving the grid 104 through the grid moving section 108.

 Step S211:

5 The control device 111 stands by until the grid oscillation convergence time T_{ge} determined in step S203 elapses.

Step S212:

When recognizing that the grid oscillation convergence time T_{ge} has elapsed, the control device 111 causes the signal reading section 107 to start reading out the signal accumulated in
10 the sensor 106.

In the operation control for the radiation imaging system 100 shown in the flow chart of Fig. 2, especially, since the operation stands by for the post-irradiation delay time T_{xe} after the elapse of irradiation time T_{exp} , stripe image formation on the object by the grid 104 can be prevented.

15 In addition, since drive of the grid 104 is stopped, the influence of electromagnetic noise generated from the grid moving section 108 can be prevented.

Furthermore, since the operation stands by for the grid oscillation convergence time T_{ge} after the stop of drive of the grid 104, the influence of device oscillation can be prevented.

Hence, after the imaging request from the user is recognized, the control device 111
20 controls the operation of the system 100 in accordance with the flow chart in Fig. 2, thereby acquiring a satisfactory image.

The above operation control for the radiation imaging system 100 will be described below in more detail with reference to the timing charts shown in Figs. 3A to 3F.

The timing charts of Figs. 3A to 3F explain timings after the imaging button 116 is
25 pressed.

In accordance with the imaging conditions input by the user, for example,

Irradiation time $T_{exp} = 100$ ms

Sensor initialization time $T_{ss} = 200$ ms

Grid initialization time $T_{gs} = 300$ ms

30 Pre-irradiation delay time $T_{xs} = 100$ ms

Grid oscillation convergence time $T_{ge} = 300$ ms

Post-irradiation delay time $T_{xe} = 100$ ms

are determined.

5 In this case, the irradiation delay time T_l [as] is the longest time of the sensor initialization time T_{ss} , grid initialization time T_{gs} , and pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} and is determined by

$$T_l = \max(T_{ss}, T_{gs}, T_{xs}) = T_{gs} = 300 \text{ ms.}$$

Operation control until radiation irradiation is determined from these initial conditions.

10 Next, control timings for sensor initialization, start of grid movement, and irradiation permission instruction after recognition of the imaging request are determined by subtracting a corresponding time required for operation from the irradiation delay time T_l .

Sensor initialization timing: $T_l - T_{ss}$ 100 ms

Grid movement start timing: $T_l - T_{gs}$ 0 ms

15 Irradiation enable signal transmission timing:

$$T_l - T_{xs} = 200 \text{ ms}$$

Control timings after radiation irradiation are so determined that movement control for the grid 104 is stopped after the elapse of actual irradiation time obtained by adding the irradiation time T_{exp} and post-irradiation delay time T_{xe} to the irradiation delay T_l , and the
20 signal read from the sensor 106 is started after the elapse of grid oscillation convergence time T_{ge} .

That is, the grid control stop timing and signal read start timing are determined by

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Grid control stop timing: } T_l + T_{exp} + T_{xe} \\ = 500 \text{ ms} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Signal read start timing: } T_l + T_{exp} + T_{xe} + T_{ge} \\ = 800 \text{ ms} \end{aligned}$$

25 After the control timings are determined, an imaging request (Fig. 3A) input by the user by pressing the imaging button 116 is waited upon.

When an imaging request is recognized, operation control for the radiation imaging
30 system 100 is started on the basis of the determined control timings.

First, movement (motion) of the grid 104 is started, as shown in Fig. 3B.

The moving speed of the grid 104 acceleratngly increases and reaches an irradiation enable state after the elapse of 300 ms (grid initialization time $T_{gs} = 300 \text{ ms}$), as shown in Fig. 3C.

5 Next, as shown in Fig. 3F, after the elapse of 100 ms (sensor initialization timing: $T_I - T_{ss} = 100$ ms) from imaging request recognition, initialization of the sensor 106 is started. After the elapse of 200 ms (sensor initialization time $T_{ss} = 200$ ms), initialization of the sensor 106 is ended.

10 As shown in Fig. 3D, after the elapse of 200 ms (irradiation enable signal transmission timing: $T_I - T_{xs} = 200$ ms) from imaging request recognition, the radiation generator 117 is instructed to start irradiation.

15 The radiation generator 117 starts actual irradiation after the elapse of 100 ms (pre-irradiation delay time $T_{xs} = 100$ ms), as shown in Fig. 3E. The end timing of sensor initialization (end timing of the sensor initialization time T_{ss}), the end timing of grid movement (end timing of the grid initialization time T_{gs}), and the end timing of irradiation enable signal transmission (end timing of the pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs}) match the end timing of the irradiation delay time T_I from the imaging request to actual irradiation.

 After the elapse of 500 ms (grid control stop timing: $T_I + T_{exp} + T_{xe} = 500$ ms) from imaging request recognition, actual irradiation by the radiation generator 117 is ended.

20 At this time, movement control for the grid 104 is stopped, as shown in Fig. 3B, and the moving speed of the grid 104 gradually decreases. Along with this deceleration, the oscillation of the imaging device 110, that is generated by moving the grid 104, starts converging.

25 After that, as shown in Fig. 3F, after the elapse of 800 ms (signal read start timing: $T_I + T_{exp} + T_{xe} + T_{ge} = 800$ ms) from imaging request recognition, the signal reading section 107 is instructed to end signal accumulation in the sensor 106 and start reading the signal.

 At this time, the oscillation of the imaging device 110 has become so small that it does not affect the image quality. As a result, a satisfactory image can be obtained.

(Second Embodiment)

 The present invention is applied to, e.g., a radiation imaging system 300 as shown in Fig.

30 4.

 This radiation imaging system 300 has the same arrangement as that of the radiation imaging system 100 shown in Fig. 1 except that a radiation detector 302 for detecting a radiation irradiation state and an oscillation measurement device 301 for measuring the oscillation state of a grid 104 are prepared in an imaging device 110.

5 The same reference numerals as in the radiation imaging system 100 shown in Fig. 1 denote the same parts in the radiation imaging system 300 shown in Fig. 4, and a detailed description thereof will be omitted. Only parts different from the radiation imaging system 100 in Fig. 1 will be described in detail.

 Fig. 5 is a flow chart showing operation control processing executed by a control device
10 111 of this embodiment for the system 300. Figs. 6A to 6H are timing charts showing the operation control timing.

 The same step numbers as in the flow chart of Fig. 2 denote the same processing steps in the flow chart of Fig. 5, and a detailed description thereof will be omitted.

 Step S201:

15 The control device 111 recognizes an irradiation time T_{exp} , the type of sensor 106 used for imaging, and the type of radiation tube 101 on the basis of imaging conditions selectively input by the user through an imaging condition instruction device 115.

 In accordance with the recognized information, the control device 111 determines control until radiation irradiation and control after radiation irradiation by processing from step S202.

20 Step S202:

 The control device 111 determines a sensor initialization time T_{ss} in accordance with the type of sensor 106.

 Step S203':

 The control device 111 determines a grid initialization time T_g (time until the grid 104
25 reaches the target moving speed and position) from the irradiation time T_{exp} .

 Step S204':

 The control device 111 determines a pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} (time after radiation irradiation permission is instructed to a radiation generator 117 until the radiation generator 117 actually starts radiation irradiation) on the basis of the type of radiation tube 101.

30 Step S205:

 The control device 111 determines an irradiation delay time T_l (the longest time of the sensor initialization time T_{ss} , grid initialization time T_g , and pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs}).

 Step S206:

5 The control device 111 determines, as a time table before irradiation, the initialization timing of the sensor 106 as “T1 - Tss”, the drive start timing of the grid 104 as “T1 - Tgs”, and the radiation irradiation instruction (irradiation permission) timing for the radiation generator 117 as “T1 - Txs”.

Step S207:

10 After control before radiation irradiation is determined in the above-described way, the control device 111 determines whether an imaging request is input by the user through an imaging button 116 and stands by until an imaging request is received.

Step S208:

15 Upon recognizing that an imaging request is input by the user through the imaging button 116, the control device 111 executes operation control according to the time table determined in step S206.

Initialization of the sensor 106 is started after the elapse of “T1 - Tss”[, **[drive] Drive** of the grid 104 is started after the elapse of “T1 - Tgs”[, **and]**. **[irradiation] Irradiation** permission is executed after the elapse of “T1 - Txs”.

20 Step S209':

The control device 111 determines on the basis of a detection signal output from the radiation detector 302 whether radiation irradiation by the radiation generator 117 is ended.

Step S210:

25 Upon recognizing that radiation irradiation by the radiation generator 117 is ended, the control device 111 stops driving the grid 104 through a grid moving section 108.

Step S211':

The control device 111 determines on the basis of a measurement result from the oscillation measurement device 301 whether the oscillation of the grid 104 has converged.

Step S212:

30 When recognizing that the oscillation of the grid 104 has converged, the control device 111 causes a signal reading section 107 to start reading out the signal accumulated in the sensor 106.

In the operation control for the radiation imaging system 300 shown in the flow chart of Fig. 5, especially when the end of radiation irradiation is recognized in accordance with the

5 detection result from the radiation detector 302, drive of the grid 104 is stopped. For this reason, the influence of electromagnetic noise generated from the grid moving section 108 can be prevented.

Furthermore, since the operation stands until it is determined on the basis of the measurement result from the oscillation measurement device 301 that the oscillation of the grid
10 104 has converged after the stop of drive of the grid 104, the influence of device oscillation can be prevented.

Hence, after the imaging request from the user is recognized, the control device 111 controls the operation of the system 300 in accordance with the flow chart in Fig. 5, thereby acquiring a satisfactory image.

15 The above operation control for the radiation imaging system 300 will be described below in more detail with reference to the timing charts shown in Figs. 6A to 6H.

The timing charts of Figs. 6A to 6H explain timings after the imaging button 116 is pressed.

In accordance with the imaging conditions input by the user, for example,
20 Irradiation time $T_{exp} = 100$ ms
Sensor initialization time $T_{ss} = 200$ ms
Grid initialization time $T_{gs} = 300$ ms
Pre-irradiation delay time $T_{xs} = 100$ ms

are determined.

25 In this case, the irradiation delay time T_l [as] is the longest time of the sensor initialization time T_{ss} , grid initialization time T_{gs} , and pre-irradiation delay time T_{xs} and is determined by

$$T_l = \max(T_{ss}, T_{gs}, T_{xs}) = T_{gs} = 300 \text{ ms.}$$

Operation control until radiation irradiation is determined from these initial conditions.

30 Next, control timings for sensor initialization, start of grid movement, and irradiation permission instruction after recognition of the imaging request are determined by subtracting a corresponding time required for operation from the irradiation delay time T_l .

Sensor initialization timing: $T_l T_{ss} = 100$ ms

Grid movement start timing: $T_l T_{gs} = 0$ ms

5 Irradiation enable signal transmission timing:

$$T1 - Txs = 200 \text{ ms}$$

After the control timings are determined, an imaging request (Fig. 6A) input by the user by pressing the imaging button 116 is waited upon.

When an imaging request is recognized, operation control for the radiation imaging
10 system 300 is started on the basis of the determined control timings.

First, movement (motion) of the grid 104 is started, as shown in Fig. 6B. Simultaneously, the oscillation detection signal representing that the grid 104 is in a moving state is set at High level, as shown in Fig. 6G.

The moving speed of the grid 104 acceleratngly increases and reaches an irradiation
15 enable state after the elapse of 300 ms (grid initialization time $Tgs = 300 \text{ ms}$), as shown in Fig. 6C.

Next, as shown in Fig. 6H, after the elapse of 100 ms (sensor initialization timing: $T1 - Tss = 100 \text{ ms}$) from imaging request recognition, initialization of the sensor 106 is started. After the elapse of 200 ms (sensor initialization time $Tss = 200 \text{ ms}$), initialization of the sensor 106 is
20 ended.

As shown in Fig. 6D, after the elapse of 200 ms (irradiation enable signal transmission timing: $T1 - Txs = 200 \text{ ms}$) from imaging request recognition, the radiation generator 117 is instructed to start irradiation.

The radiation generator 117 starts actual irradiation after the elapse of 100 ms (pre-
25 irradiation delay time $Txs = 100 \text{ ms}$), as shown in Fig. 6E. Simultaneously, the radiation detection signal representing radiation irradiation is set at High level, as shown in Fig. 6F.

When radiation irradiation is ended, and the output from the radiation detector 302 becomes smaller than a predetermined threshold value, it is determined that irradiation is ended. As shown in Fig. 6F, the radiation detection signal is set at Low level. Along with this
30 processing, movement control for the grid 104 is stopped, as shown in Fig. 6B. The moving speed of the grid 104 gradually decreases. The oscillation state of the grid 104 at this time is observed by the oscillation measurement device 301.

When the oscillation of the imaging device 110, that is generated by moving the grid 104, starts converging, and it is recognized that the output from the oscillation measurement device

5 301 becomes smaller than a predetermined oscillation amount, the oscillation detection signal is set at Low level, as shown in Fig. 6G.

As shown in Fig. 6F, the signal reading section 107 is instructed to end signal accumulation in the sensor 106 and start reading the signal.

At this time, the oscillation of the imaging device 110 has become so small that it does
10 not affect the image quality. As a result, a satisfactory image can be obtained.

The object of the present invention is achieved even by supplying a storage medium which stores software program codes for implementing the functions of **[the host and terminal]** the first and second embodiments **[to] in** a system or apparatus and causing the computer (or a CPU or MPU) of the system or apparatus to read out and execute the program codes stored in the
15 storage medium.

In this case, the program codes read out from the storage medium implement the functions of the first and second embodiments by themselves, and the storage medium which stores the program codes constitutes the present invention.

As a storage medium for supplying the program codes, for example, a ROM, a floppy
20 disk, hard disk, optical disk, magnetooptical disk, CD-ROM, CD-R, magnetic tape, nonvolatile memory card or the like can be used.

The functions of the first and second embodiments are implemented not only when the readout program codes are executed by the computer, but also when the operating system (OS) running on the computer performs part or all of actual processing on the basis of the instructions
25 of the program codes.

The functions of the first and second embodiments are also implemented when the program codes read out from the storage medium are written in the memory of a function expansion board inserted into the computer or a function expansion unit connected to the computer[, and the]. **The** CPU of the function expansion board or function expansion unit
30 performs part or all of actual processing on the basis of the instructions of the program codes.

As has been described above, in the above embodiments, **[since]** the timing when the irradiation means is permitted to perform irradiation is determined from the initialization time of the image sensing means (e.g., two-dimensional solid-state image sensing element) and the irradiation delay time (delay time after irradiation execution instruction, i.e., irradiation

5 permission is issued until actual irradiation is performed) of the irradiation means (e.g., radiation generation means)[,]. **Therefore,** imaging operation control for an imaging request and initialization of the image sensing element can be parallelly executed. **[Hence] Accordingly,** the time delay from the imaging request to actual irradiation can be shortened.

10 Additionally, **[since]** the timing when the irradiation means is permitted to perform irradiation is determined from the initialization time of the image sensing means and the initialization time of grid movement (delay time until the grid moves to an appropriate target position), or the initialization time of the image sensing means, the irradiation delay time of the irradiation means, and the initialization time of grid movement[,]. **Therefore,** imaging operation control for an imaging request and initialization of the image sensing element and/or grid
15 movement can be parallelly executed. **[Hence] Accordingly,** the time delay from the imaging request to actual irradiation can be shortened. Furthermore, since grid movement such as the grid position or speed can be controlled in consideration of the irradiation delay time corresponding to the irradiation means used for imaging, a satisfactory image without any grid stripe image formation on the object can be obtained.

20 Hence, according to the above embodiments, a satisfactory image can be obtained at a desired imaging timing.

For example, when the present invention is applied to radiation imaging, a satisfactory radiation image without any grid stripe image formation on the object can be provided, and any diagnostic error in image diagnosis can be reliably prevented.

25 The present invention is not limited to the above embodiments and various changes and modifications can be made within the spirit and scope of the present invention. Therefore, to apprise the public of the scope of the present invention, the following claims are made.